SUCCESSFUL SUPERMARKETS IN LOW-INCOME INNER CITIES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to investigate successful supermarkets in low-income inner-city communities throughout the United States. This was done because of a concern that there are too few supermarkets in such areas and because of the characteristics of supermarkets which sell a large variety of quality foods at reasonable prices.

The study describes 14 supermarkets in 10 cities, selected from a nationwide group of 250 supermarkets identified as successfully doing business in large city, low-income areas. The results of the study show that there are some thriving supermarkets within large city low-income areas -- that it is possible for supermarkets to operate successfully in such areas. The study thus offers direct evidence that the normal channels of retail food trade -- modern supermarkets -- can serve to meet the evident need for better access to quality food by many residents of the inner cities.

The study identifies factors critical to the success of these supermarkets as well as other factors which encourage the entry and retention of inner-city supermarkets.

Further, the study argues that inner-city supermarkets, used to their full advantage, can promote good dietary habits and can positively affect the use of food stamps, the women, infants and children program (WIC) and nutrition education programs.

The study found that the successful supermarkets were the result of professional supermarket management being attuned to the needs and wants of the specific communities they served. Their success was augmented when the supermarkets, the cities and community development organizations cooperated to create viable food shopping opportunities in the inner city.

Additional findings of the study include:

- Some supermarkets have developed reasonable solutions to the ongoing problems which have plagued inner-city supermarkets for 25 years.

- While many supermarkets left the inner city during the 1960s, many stayed and successfully served their communities.

- Others have returned and succeeded. In one case a major chain has developed from a premise that adequately serving the needs of lower-income customers can be profitable to the company and the community it serves.